

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1-15. (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) A process to improve coagulation of milk during its transformation into dairy products comprising: ~~-adding to the milk, before coagulation treatment,~~

- adding a starter culture to the milk;

- coagulating the milk by adding a coagulant to yield a coagulum;

- cutting the coagulum;

- separating the curd from the whey;

wherein

- before adding the starter culture to the milk at least one strain of lactic bacteria ~~chosen~~ selected from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG-P- 21385, *L. lactis subsp. lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis subsp. lactis* LMG-P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389 is added to the milk.

17. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk in the form of liquid culture.

18. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk in anhydrous form.

19. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from 0.1 to 1% of liquid culture with respect to the milk (volume/volume).

20. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 19, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from 0.3 to 0.5% of liquid culture in respect of the milk (volume/volume).

21. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from  $10^{11}$  to  $10^{12}$  CFU/100 litres of milk.

22. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said at least one strain is added to the milk before pasteurization.
23. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, further comprising the step of preparing a milk derivative from the milk after said adding step.
24. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 23, wherein said milk derivative is cheese or yogurt.
25. (previously presented) A strain of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.
26. (previously presented) The strain of lactic bacteria of claim 25, in combination with one or more different strains of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P-21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.
27. (previously presented) The combination of claim 26, said combination of strains being suitable to improve or promote milk coagulation.
28. (previously presented) Milk containing one or more strains of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.
29. (previously presented) Milk according to claim 28, said milk being obtained from a process comprising adding to the milk, before coagulation treatment, one or more strains of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.
30. (previously presented) A dairy product derived from milk according to claim 29.